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ORAL ENGLISH IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

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The first step which must be taken in teaching a child the use of correct and effective English is to enlist his co-operation. This can be done readily by convincing him of the need. The teacher may ask, "Why do you like your minister?" Or the same question may be asked about any speaker that the children have heard recently. The class may discuss the speaker's position, voice, manner, and ideas and at the end of the discussion build upon the board an outline of the qualities which are desirable in a speaker. The children may even copy this outline in their notebooks as a standard. The desire to be liked is universal; so when we show children that correct position, voice, manner, and ideas make a speaker attractive, they will strive to attain these excellences in their own speaking.

Children may be appealed to from the commercial standpoint also. Ruskin has said, "The rule is five thousand a year to your talker and a shilling a day to your fighter, digger, and thinker." The man who speaks correctly and impressively gets the job, the clerk who knows his mother-tongue gets to be head clerk, and the boss who handles his speech effectively is a desirable manager. The child is quick to see the necessity for the best English, and when his co-operation is gained the battle is half won.

The teacher's work now is to furnish natural situations which are interesting and which call forth a natural response.

One of the most natural situations takes the form of conversational lessons. Any topic of interest may be discussed, such as "Means by Which a Basket-Ball Team Might Be Organized," "Some Recent High-School News," personal experiences, or current events. In this type of lesson, particularly, the classroom should be as little like a schoolroom as is possible. Chairs may be placed in a circle and students should be encouraged to speak

naturally, without raising hands for permission. Right now they can learn not to speak while others are talking. If grammatical errors are made, the teacher may correct them in an unobtrusive manner. The entire class may criticize the remarks at the end of the hour without being personal. The criticisms should not be destructive but constructive. Something good should always be said, particularly concerning the remarks made by the timid and bashful student.

Sometimes the one-minute talk will aid the student in self-expression. This may be assigned the student the day before for preparation. The subject of a talk may be whatever the speaker is most interested in: funny experiences, processes, descriptions of people or articles, anecdotes, historical events, etc. At first the student should be allowed to use notes. It would be well for the teacher to teach students to make outlines; this will avoid loose and illogical talks. By the attitude of the teacher and the class, timid students may be encouraged. As long as possible the talks should be voluntary. The teacher or students may keep record of each child's position, voice, style, and ideas on a card. As the speaker overcomes his errors, they should be marked off his card. Something good should be said about each talk.

Later on two-minute and five-minute talks may be given. As the students become more accustomed to speaking before the class they may be called on to make a talk with only five minutes' notice in which to make an outline. The class should be organized into a club on the days when talks are given. Here the students can be taught to follow parliamentary rules. The teacher is present just to unobtrusively keep things going. The class may also learn to take notes as the talks are being given, either on subject-matter or in the form of criticisms. Again, criticisms may be given at the end of the class.

Often in life men and women are called on to give an opinion about some question with little warning. Training may be given by means of a question game. Have each student write on a slip of paper a question for some member of the class to answer. The questions should be given out and five minutes allowed for the making of brief notes; then the questions should be answered in

the form of short talks. Interesting and simple questions must be asked, such as "What book have you recently enjoyed?" or "What profession would you like to enter?"

To give more ease in expression before an audience, reports on books read may be given in the form of short talks. This will serve to check up the supplementary reading and perhaps interest other students in reading those books.

Literary societies furnish opportunities for talks which are prepared and memorized. As long as a person must grope for words, his position, voice, and manner are neglected. If the student thinks of these in memorized speeches, the correct position and pleasing voice and manner may become habitual, and he will use them finally in extemporaneous talks. The teacher should not neglect the literary society but should encourage and help the students in their efforts to improve.

Occasionally a few odd moments may be used for telling jokes. The making of a joke is the manner in which it is told. How many of us in our efforts to be entertaining have tried to tell a joke and had it "fall flat," as we say. This is our opportunity to offer constructive criticisms and help the students in acquiring the ability to tell an enjoyable joke. We may also help them in their selection of wholesome jokes.

Arnold has said, "A voice for every man in his country's government is necessary for the society of the future." If this is the case, debates should not be neglected. Nothing will interest children more than a class debate; that appeals to their fighting instinct. A chairman and three judges may be appointed and the class divided into halves. The affirmative should sit on one side of the room and the negative on the other. The chairman lets one on the affirmative make one point, then gives one on the negative side a chance. As many are allowed to speak as possible. The judges may judge the talk of each speaker, counting voice 10 per cent, delivery 10 per cent, style 20 per cent, and ideas 60 per cent. Debates in which only four or six are involved should be held in literary societies, but debates in classrooms should be class debates, because thus they include a greater number of students. Some suggestive subjects for debates are: (1) Inventors Are More Useful

to a Community Than Writers. (2) Ought a Boy to Go in Debt for a College Education? (3) Student Government Is Desirable. (4) Roadside Advertisements Should Be Abolished.

A mock trial may be held in order that the children may have further practice in speaking. In this way they may be made familiar with the judicial department of the government. Last year our student body held an interesting mock trial in which one boy was accused of stealing a lump of sugar from the domestic science department.

Another form oral English may take is that of a symposium. The subject given might be "Our City." Each member of the class might report on some phase of the city machinery. The class may take notes on the reports made. At the end of the period a vote may be taken to decide who made the best report. Another subject which would stir up the community as well as give an opportunity for oral English is, "What Our City Needs." After the reports are given orally, they should be written up and handed to the newspaper for publication.

Dramatization has a place in the oral English of the high school because it develops habits which are useful in later life. It requires co-operation, concentration, and ingenuity. The student actors have to live the lives of other people in other ages and thus their knowledge of history and humanity is broadened. It would be well to give two elaborate public plays during the year, but I think the shorter plays given oftener are even more beneficial. Last year in our literary societies we gave one short play every three weeks. For these plays we generally had about three rehearsals. As we say of some plants that we can just see them growing, so we could just see those children developing in power to stand before people and say clearly what they thought.

Now I want to put in a plea for one of our lost arts—the art of story-telling. Who is so fortunate as the family that has a mother, father, brother, or sister who can tell stories in the twilight? Meredith Nicholson says that fairy tales are every child's birthright. I agree with him, but I also must include in each child's birthright the history stories, nature stories, and Bible stories. The ability to tell these stories may be gained in the high school. As a

reward and further opportunity for telling stories, a story-hour may be held for the children of the community and students who tell stories best be allowed to hold them. Besides the value in English work, this will introduce the students to social service.

As a summarizing paragraph, I quote Mary Percival: "A teacher's success in accomplishing results through oral composition lies in her skill in selecting and assigning topics, in her tact in arousing the enthusiasm of her pupils and securing a favorable atmosphere in the classroom, and in her power to make her criticism constructive. The teacher's position in the schoolroom must be a less autocratic one than it has been. Her function is to direct, to suggest, to encourage, to inspire, and to appreciate rather than to dictate, to question, and to examine."